

NANNYBERRY

Viburnum lentago L.

Plant Symbol = VILE

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Alternate Names

Sheepberry, wild raisin, sweet viburnum, nannyberry

Uses

Nannyberry is shade-tolerant species useful in landscape plantings as shrub borders, taller barriers, hedges, and windbreaks. It produces good seasonal displays of flowers, fruits, and fall leaf color and the fruit are eaten by many species of birds and wildlife. Cultivars are not commonly available.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

Description

General: Honeysuckle family (Caprifoliaceae). Native, multi-stemmed shrubs or small trees growing to 9 m high, somewhat open at maturity and leggy at the base, the crown irregular to rounded, often suckering at the base; bark dark gray to black, forming a pattern of small blocks. Leaves are deciduous, simple, opposite, elliptic-obovate to ovate, 5-10 cm long, long-pointed, glabrous or nearly so on both sides, the petiole with a wavy-winged margin, margins finely toothed; mature foliage dark glossy,

green, becoming deep maroon to red in the fall. Flowers are small, all bisexual, creamy white, in flat-topped clusters 5-12 cm wide. Fruit in hanging clusters, berry-like (a drupe), oval to nearly round, 10-15 mm long, changing from green to yellow, pink, rose and finally to blue-black, sweet and edible, with an odor of wet sheep wool when ripe and rotting, with a single, smooth, nearly flat stone.

Distribution

Across northeastern North America, from New Brunswick and Quebec to Saskatchewan, south to Colorado and Nebraska (rare), Missouri (extinct), West Virginia, and Pennsylvania, rare in the Appalachians in Maryland and Virginia and apparently disjunct in Georgia. For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site. A detailed distribution map is also provided by Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center (2000).

Adaptation

Common habitats for nannyberry are low woods, swamp borders, and rich valleys at or near streambanks, usually in rich loam to clay-loam soil. It also occurs in moist soil of wooded slopes and other upland sites, sometimes even in sandy or rocky soil. It is a shade-tolerant understory shrub, but reaches relatively larger size in partial openings or along edges. Flowering occurs in May-June and fruits in July-September.

Establishment

Reproduction is primarily by seed. Suckering from the base can replace and add to main stems. The "leggy" habit sometimes allows lower branches to fall over – they root where touching the ground.

Management

Nannyberry is one of the more shade-tolerant woody plants, but it also grows well in open sites. It is tolerant of both moist and dry soils. It is easily transplanted and established and can be propagated by cuttings. Although the growth habit is primarily a multi-stemmed shrub, it can be maintained as a small tree by pruning stems and removing basal suckers.

Pests & Potential Problems

Nannyberry is susceptible to powdery mildew where air circulation is not good. Infected plants are not killed but the leaves can be discolored and disfigured in late summer and fall.

Viburnum leaf beetle. The viburnum leaf beetle (*Pyrrhalta viburni*), native to Europe and Asia, was first encountered in North America in 1947, perhaps arriving earlier from Europe on nursery plants. It received little notice until 1978, when it caused severe defoliation of ornamental viburnums in Ontario and Quebec. It has now reached western New York and Maine and become a concern in urban landscapes and nurseries.

The adult and the larva “skeletonize” leaves by feeding on the leaves between the midrib and larger veins. Plants, which have been defoliated for 2-3 consecutive years, may be killed. The preferred host is *Viburnum opulus* and its selections; lesser damage is caused to *V. lantana* and *V. acerifolium*, *V. dentatum*, *V. lentago*, and *V. rafinesquianum*. Other species, particularly *V. rhytidophyllum* and *V. carlesii*, are relatively unaffected.

The entire life cycle of the viburnum leaf beetle takes about 8-10 weeks. Larvae hatch in early May and feed on the viburnum leaves throughout the larval period, which lasts 4-5 weeks. The larvae pupate in the soil. The adults (4.5-6.5 mm long, brown) appear by mid-July and continue eating the leaves, then mate and lay over-wintering eggs on the twigs. Egg-laying holes are in a straight line on the underside of the current season's growth.

Chemical control of the viburnum leaf beetle is best applied to young larvae, because adults will fly away or drop to the ground if disturbed. If over-wintering egg sites are found, affected wood should be pruned and destroyed before the eggs hatch. Examine upper and lower leaf surfaces for feeding larvae. Potential biological control mechanisms are being studied.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

These plant materials are readily available from commercial sources. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under “United States Government.” The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading “Department of Agriculture.”

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